

Why Veterans Need to Stop Self-Selecting

After the Military

There is a pattern that shows up over and over again after the military.

It has nothing to do with discipline.

It has nothing to do with ability.

It has everything to do with what people tell themselves.

In a recent conversation on *The Enduring Mindset Podcast*, I sat down with Navy veteran Kaedy Molley to talk about transition, identity, and one of the biggest mistakes veterans make after leaving service.

The Problem Isn't Capability

Most veterans underestimate themselves.

Not because they lack skill.

Because they have convinced themselves they are not ready.

Kaedy described this mindset clearly.

Veterans walk into new environments, especially education, believing they will be:

- The least capable
- The least prepared
- The weakest person in the room

That belief is rarely true.

But it becomes real when they act on it.

What “Self-Selecting” Really Means

In the military, there is a phrase used in elite training environments:

Do not self-select.

Do not quit before you are told to quit.

Do not eliminate yourself before you are tested.

That same idea applies after the military.

Kaedy sees it all the time with veterans considering college or new careers.

They talk themselves out of opportunities before ever trying.

“You’ve been telling yourself something that is a false narrative all along... you’re self-defeating and self-selecting.”

The Identity Trap

Part of the problem is identity.

In the military, identity is clear:

- Rank
- Role
- Mission

When that goes away, people start questioning everything.

Instead of building something new, they hesitate.

They compare themselves to others.

They assume they do not belong.

Curiosity Changes Everything

One of the biggest turning points in Kaedy’s journey was simple:

She stayed curious.

Instead of assuming she was not capable, she asked:

What happens if I try?

That mindset led her to opportunities most veterans never even consider.

- Academic programs
- Top-tier universities
- New career paths
- New communities

Curiosity opened doors.

You Are More Than One Thing

One of the most powerful ideas she shared was this:

You are not just a veteran.

You are not just one identity.

She described it like a Rubik’s Cube.

Different sides. Different dimensions. Always evolving.

“Think of yourself as a Rubik’s Cube... you have a billion different blocks to fill in as you go along.”

When you reduce yourself to one identity, you limit your growth.

The Reality About Transition

There is another hard truth veterans need to understand.

Nothing is going to be handed to you.

Your service matters.

But it does not guarantee opportunity.

You still have to:

- Learn
- Adapt
- Compete
- Earn your place

That is not a disadvantage.

It is just reality.

Growth Requires Discomfort

The environments that change you are uncomfortable.

New schools.

New careers.

New people.

Kaedy leaned into that.

Instead of avoiding discomfort, she used it.

That is where growth happens.

What This Means for You

If you are feeling stuck after the military, start here:

1. Stop eliminating yourself

Do not decide you are not good enough before you try.

2. Get curious

Look for opportunities instead of reasons to avoid them.

3. Expand your identity

You are more than your military experience.

4. Accept discomfort

That is where growth lives.

5. Take the shot

You cannot succeed at something you never attempt.

Final Thought

Most veterans do not fail because they cannot succeed.

They fail because they decide not to try.

They stop themselves long before the world ever gets a chance to.



Listen to the full episode:

 <https://open.spotify.com/show/7fQ5oHIOZe94Jcjj6ytL2h?si=0c4c82fc29c6465f>

If you're a veteran or leader trying to figure out your next move, I share conversations and insights like this every week through The Enduring Mindset Podcast.

Related conversations:

- *Stop Waiting for Permission to Become Who You Already Are*
- *What Happens When the Dream Doesn't Go the Way You Planned*
- *Why Taking Risks Matters After the Military*